

and Elena, taught me to work hard and respect others. I am married to a wonderful wife, Maria Elena, who has stood with me through the peaks and valleys of the last 25 years. We are the parents of a phenomenal son, Nicolas Miguel, who has brought us joy we never knew possible and has taught us the true meaning of love. In addition, though my roots are humble, I have had the privilege of working in this Chamber. Few people get the privilege to serve here.

Yet Congress isn't what it once was. Agreements are few, partisan rancor is common, statesmanship is rare. Who are the giants of history among us? Where are the statesmen and -women who accomplished historic feats through significant signature legislative achievements?

But we know that progress is still possible. We saw this session that when Congress puts party labels aside and gets to work, like we did on VA reform, we can accomplish some great things for the American people. But those occasions were far too rare.

More often, this Chamber saw bickering and pettiness, and this Congress made history as the least productive and most unpopular Congress in the history of this proud Nation. The American people responded by making history of their own. On election day, a record number of them simply threw up their hands, wondered what is the point, and didn't go to the polls.

It is easy to see why Americans are so tired of politics, to understand why many of us don't check in on election day; when our democracy needs us the most, we check out.

Polarization, discontent, dissatisfaction, disappointment, dismay—all now normal in the course of our public discourse. Old-fashioned values like truth and good manners and respect for others' views and appreciation are no longer in vogue. Candidates and officeholders and super-PACs are shrill and mean—and yes, for some, the word would be even un-Christian—to one another.

Politicians distort truth and attempt to stampede people with fear, and many times our fears or our lack of faith win out. We fail to realize how really truly lucky we are as Americans.

Before chiding people for not meeting their civic responsibilities, Congress as a body should reflect on whether it has been meeting its own responsibility because even Congress complains about Congress, yet it does nothing to change. Most Americans are somewhere in the middle, but that is not where Congress is. In our current system, super-PACs attack those Members who stake out middle grounds.

The American people deserve better than they are getting. Our country deserves better. Our future and our children's future is too important. Both Congress and our country must rise to the occasion and confront and conquer our own internal paralysis. Patriotism must trump partisanship.

A robust democracy requires active participation. Congress—indeed, America—needs all of us. It needs Democrats and Republicans and Libertarians and Latinos and Anglos and African Americans and Asians—Americans all.

Soon I will have the highest title that any American can have—not the title of an elected official, but the title of citizen. And as a citizen, I hope to continue to remind Congress of the importance of governing well and our fellow Americans of the importance of participating in our electoral system.

I have faith that ours is a resilient Nation blessed by God. Despite our frustrations and our fears and our failings, despite ourselves, we still live in the greatest Nation the world has ever known.

Sure, times are tough, but they were tougher for our parents and our grandparents. If you think back a moment and you compare your life to theirs, you can see how far you and all of us have come.

The job now is not to be mad about and continually relive the old battles of the past nor to be afraid of the future, but to look forward and to build our future together.

I leave this institution with no regrets and many accomplishments for the people of home, particularly grateful for the opportunity to work with and serve our veterans and our Active Duty military and amazed at the incredible and still untapped potential of our amazing democracy.

I want to say thank you to each of my employees and thank you again to all the people of the 23rd District of Texas, especially to those I have had the privilege of representing since I first became a State legislator in 1991.

I wish my successor well, and I offer my prayers for all the Members of the 114th Congress. You are capable of doing great things for America when you remember to put people and policy ahead of partisanship and politics.

May God bless Texas, and may God bless the United States of America.

PROUDLY RESTORING OFFICERS OF PRIOR ENLISTMENT RETIREMENT ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss the Proudly Restoring Officers of Prior Enlistment Retirement, or PROPER, Act legislation that I will be introducing this week that will support America's involuntarily separated servicemembers.

For the first time since the 1990s, the Army is shrinking. As our military continues to draw down in the Middle East, all service branches have been tasked with making difficult force reduction decisions.

Our All-Volunteer service has made considerable sacrifices, valiantly fight-

ing two concurrent wars while solely remaining dedicated to the mission at hand.

As the Pentagon continues to implement a drawdown policy, provisions in the law could create unwarranted and unnecessary reductions to military retirement pay for thousands of involuntarily separated servicemembers.

Mr. Speaker, these men and women have honorably served our country and deserve better. For example, some prior enlisted soldiers who received a commission into the officer corps are now facing a difficult situation. Years after being commissioned, the Army has made the determination to relieve these experienced soldiers from military service.

To make the situation worse, many of these individuals do not have the required time in the officer corps and are forced to receive a lesser retirement pension. Mr. Speaker, after having earned an officer's rank, these soldiers have been reduced in rank for retirement purposes.

Mr. Speaker, our soldiers have honorably served our country and deserve better. These men and women deserve to collect full pension and benefits equivalent to their service in uniform and not subjected to an arbitrary reduction in rank and pay after being involuntarily separated from the military.

To prevent this injustice, I will soon be introducing the Proudly Restoring Officers of Prior Enlistment Retirement, or PROPER, Act. The PROPER Act does not prevent further troop reduction. It merely assures these soldiers and those affected, through each military branch, can be made financially whole with due respect for their service.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. GUTIÉRREZ) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GUTIÉRREZ. Mr. Speaker, as The New York Times said in an editorial last week, there is an immigration crisis looming next year, but it has nothing to do with the border. Rather, it is the huge effort that will be needed to fulfill the President's executive actions and get millions—millions—of American families out of harm's way by protecting them from deportation and destruction.

Sure, we are celebrating the series of executive actions taken by the President, but we are also rolling up our sleeves and getting to work. So I want to talk just a little bit about what we are doing in the city of Chicago and what I am hoping my colleagues here in Congress and my colleagues across the country in community-based organizations, the legal community, and immigrant and Latino neighborhoods in every State will do to help with getting people ready to sign up when the window to submit applications opens in 180 days and the government's review of cases begins.